19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XIV

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Political Arrangements

The Karen race does not possess what may be termed social solidarity. It is broken up into many tribes, some of which differ considerably from others, as, for instance, the Brecs of Karenni and the Sgaw Karen of Lower Burma. There is, however, enough similarity of dialects and traditions, as well as of religion and customs, to make it certain that they really belong together and are descended from a common ancestry. Even the individual tribes do not consist of compact groups of clans. To be sure, there is more cohesion among the members of one tribe than among those of different tribes; but the village rather than the tribe has the greater claim upon their adherence. In the days before the British conquest and annexation of Burma [1]—when the country received a stable government that put an end to feuds and petty warfare—the village was the political unit. In the village the houses were ranged side by side, or else, as in the Pegu Hills, all the families of the little community lived within what may be called the village-house, each family having its living-room opening off of the common corridor. Everybody was thrown into intimate contact with everybody else in the village. Politically and socially the village was the center of their common life. The family group, the natural unit of kinship, although not always confined to the village, was economically and politically subordinate to it.

In the village the elders ("phga tha phga," literally, the old men) were looked up to as connecting the village life with the past,

[1] The British conquest of Burma was accomplished in three wars, each of which was brought on by the arrogance and stupidity of the Burmese kings and their high-handed dealings with British subjects. The First Burmese War (1824-26) resulted in the ceding of the provinces of Tenasserim and Arakan to the British, in the former of which there was a considerable Karen population. The Second Burmese War (1852-53) ended with the annexation of the country of Pegu or Lower Burma, in which dwell the great body of the Karen people in Burma; and the remainder of the territory ruled by the despotic Burmese kings came to enjoy the privileges of the Indian Empire after a single short campaign of only two months' duration in 1885, known as the Third Burmese War. Soon after this an orderly government was established throughout what is now known as the province of Burma: Sir J. G. Scott, *Burma, A Handbook*, 199-205.